OPINION

BY RAFIA ZAKARIA

A Muslim mayor

IT was the first time that a copy of the Holy Quran was used at the Thursday midnight swearing-in ceremony of Zohran Mamdani as mayor of New York City. Mamdani, who was joined by his wife Rama Duwaji and New York Attorney General Letitia James, took his oath at the Old City Hall Station. The scene was dimly lit and the backdrop dramatic. At the stroke of midnight, James began to swear in the man who has radically transformed NYC politics in a single year.

Two copies of the Holy Book were used at the ceremony. One had belonged to Mamdani's grandfather and the other was part of the collection of the New York Public Library. The second copy dates back to the late 18th or early 19th century and belonged to a Black Puerto Rican. It was reportedly included in the ceremony because it represents the long history of Islam in a city with various threads of diversity. The symbolism was significant and the mood ebullient.

Later, in a huge public ceremony Mamdani was sworn in by Democratic socialist star Senator Bernie Sanders. He spoke a phrase in Urdu translating to "You have changed people's hearts" in his acceptance speech, quoting a Pakistani aunty he had encountered during his campaign.

Twenty-five years after 9/11, the impossible appears to have taken place in New York City. A Muslim mayor was elected in a city which had made hating Muslims its identity for decades. The ceremony was attended by people of all faiths and national backgrounds. At a time when immigration and diversity have been made into bad words by the Trump administration, here was a scene that celebrated the city's diversity.

"We will draw this city closer together. We will replace the frigidity of rugged individualism with the warmth of collectivism," Mamdani said from the podium to cheers. This and his other promises are going to be difficult to fulfil. Individualism and the idea of getting ahead have been the central creed of a city where people come to work in the financial market and make millions. Caring for other people or 'community' in general has not been the story that NYC has talked about. The new story that Mamdani wishes to tell of a city which will tax the rich to make it livable for everyone else is going to require a fight to translate into reality, and both Mamdani and his supporters seem to be entirely up for it.

Mamdani's election represents the end of an era. NYC's identity for the last quarter century has been attached to the events of 9/11. That identity has not only sidelined and racially profiled Muslim Americans but has also focused constantly on anti-terrorism as its basic law-enforcement principle. The New York City Police Department drew in hundreds of millions of dollars to catch terrorists — something that led brown men in general to feel constantly threatened. Against this surveillance and harassment regime (one which saw FBI and NYPD infiltrating mosques), wealthy mayors, whose administrations have often been linked to corruption, have further shaped City Hall as a place of underhand deals for big money — with little social reform to their credit. Wealthy real estate moguls such as Jared Kushner — the son-in-law of President Donald Trump — are among those Mamdani will have to tax and challenge.

Interestingly, however, Mamdani also presents a challenge to many diaspora American Muslims who have a less assimilationist idea of what it means to be Muslim American. Some have noted his Shia background and have asked how this would be viewed by some Muslim American public institutions. Mamdani is the product of an interfaith marriage, which is also a bit difficult to swallow for those who frown upon such unions. Finally, Rama Duwaji, who does not wear the hijab and has a chic, distinctive style of dressing, is likely not reflective of the image of the ideal Muslim female many conservative American Muslims espouse.

> Mamdani's vision will require a fight to translate into reality.

Whatever the old people may think, it is undoubted that for young people, and not just Muslim young people, Mamdani represents a ray of hope and a vision for the future. Two terms of Trump and the regular doses of rubbish and vitriol that his administration dishes out every day — from attacks on Venezuela to travel bans on new countries to the rising cost of living — have left Americans craving the kind of hope that Mamdani is offering.

Watching the public inauguration, it was impossible not to think of how much Mamdani's oratory and diverse background is reminiscent of former president Barack Obama's own. He was not present in the crowd, but it is likely that he too was watching. Mamdani cannot be president because he was not born in the US, but it is certain that he has a long and hopeful political future ahead of him. ■

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BY AISHA KHAN

Climate reckoning

TEN years after the Paris Agreement, the global climate report card is brutally honest and painfully incomplete. The system we built — from the UN Framework Convention to Kyoto's binding targets and Paris's nationally determined contributions — was meant to turn moral responsibility into collective action. Paris sealed a compact of solidarity: keep warming well below two degrees Celsius, pursue 1.5°C, and require those most responsible to do more. A decade on, that compact is fraying under political expediency, weak finance and geopolitical distraction. The result is not a technical failure but an ethical one, leaving millions in the Global South exposed to floods, heat and hunger.

That history matters because treaties create obligations. The UNFCCC embedded "common but differentiated responsibilities". Kyoto operationalised it through binding commitments for rich countries. Paris softened legal categories but reaffirmed the same moral claim: those with greater historical responsibility and capacity must lead through deeper emissions cuts and sustained finance. That principle remains the benchmark against which today's record must be judged.

By that standard, the financial gap is indefensible. UN assessments estimate developing countries will need roughly $310–365 billion annually by the early 2030s for adaptation alone. Yet international public adaptation finance reached only about $26bn in 2023. This is not a marginal shortfall; it is a moral chasm. Vulnerable countries are being asked to absorb escalating climate shocks without the means to protect their people.

The contrast with other spending priorities is stark. Global military expenditure exceeded $2.4 trillion in 2023. These sums dwarf adaptation needs many times over. The issue is not technical feasibility but political choice. Governments mobilise vast resources for deterrence and warfare, while investments in survival — flood defences, resilient agriculture, early warning systems, cooling infrastructure — remain chronically underfunded. That imbalance reveals what the international system values.

Why has the world fallen so far short? Fossil-fuel interests continue to delay transition. Short electoral cycles reward incrementalism where systemic change is required. Climate finance relies heavily on loans and private capital, shifting risk onto the poorest and deepening debt distress. Meanwhile, wars and rivalries crowd out climate urgency, sustaining the illusion that security can be separated from survival.

These explanations clarify behaviour, but they do not excuse it. Fiscal constraints are invoked selectively. When political will exists, governments find the money.

The human cost is already visible. In South Asia, repeated floods erase livelihoods faster than recovery finance arrives. In Pakistan, climate-amplified monsoons and heatwaves have pushed food systems and infrastructure beyond design limits. When keeping warming to 1.5°C — a threshold that would spare hundreds of millions from extreme harm — remains narrowly possible, continued delay by wealthy nations amounts to knowingly condemning poorer populations to harsher futures.

What must change is clear. Public, grant-based adaptation finance and loss-and-damage funding must scale up rapidly. Loans cannot substitute for predictable support. Loss and damage must be fully operationalised with reliable, additional funding. Multilateral development banks must expand concessional finance, ease punitive conditionalities and link debt relief to resilience. New revenue streams — including windfall levies on fossil fuels and selective redirection of military spending — must be mobilised. Accountability must be strengthened through transparency and rights-based approaches that centre affected communities. The solutions must be fair, timely and result-based. Words without matching actions don't merely sound hollow, they erode trust in the multilateral system and its credibility as an honest broker. With 1.5°C in jeopardy, the world needs to focus on staying below 2°C. The beginning of 2026 should serve as a wake-up call for global negotiators, national policymakers and regional leaders to look at the future through the lens of climate and take action before it is too late.

> A decade on, the Paris compact is fraying.

The world does not lack capital or technology. It lacks the moral courage to align spending with survival. Paris was never just a technical deal; it was an ethical recognition of shared humanity and unequal responsibility. If wealthy nations continue to fund weapons without hesitation while delaying climate obligations, they are making a choice. That choice defines the climate reckoning of our time. ■

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FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1976 | Fifty years ago

More magistrates

BAHAWALPUR: The earmarking of 40 per cent of Magistrates as Judicial Magistrates in the wake of the law reforms recently announced by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was a step towards separation of Judiciary from the Executive, observed Mr Justice Muhammad Yaqub Ali Khan, Chief Justice of Pakistan. Speaking at a dinner hosted by the Bahawalpur High Court Bar Association in his honour … he said a process has been initiated by the Government and hoped that the ultimate goal would not be far off. … He listed shortage of the presiding officers of the Courts and mutilation of the legal procedure, both by the Courts and the lawyers, as the main cause of delays in administration of justice.

He said with almost similar procedural laws in England and Pakistan, a case which was decided in weeks there took decades in Pakistan and both the Bar and Bench contributed to this delay. The Pakistan Chief Justice said … the strength of the magistracy has to be increased almost hundred per cent to ensure expeditious dispensation of justice. He had been talking to the Prime Minister in this regard and necessary steps would be taken in due course, he added. — News agencies

1951 | Seventy-five years ago

Situation unchanged

KARACHI: Sixty hours after the expiry of the original time fixed for the departure of the Prime Minister for London (7-30 p.m. of December 31) the situation remains substantially unchanged. The odds are still against his going. As a precautionary measure the officials are keeping the air bookings alive from day to day, lest — if the unexpected happened — they should be called upon to find accommodation and none might be available.

The position remains that until and unless Mr Liaquat Ali Khan receives a guarantee that the Kashmir issue will be discussed not merely between Mr Attlee, Mr Nehru and himself but at a meeting of all the Commonwealth Prime Ministers present in London, he will not consider it worth while to attend the Conference.

Late on Tuesday evening [Jan 2], at about 10 p.m. the UK High Commissioner in Karachi, Sir Laurence Grafftey Smith, called on the Prime Minister and stayed with him for quite some time. It is believed that he delivered a further message from London. While its contents, as yet, are a matter of surmise, it is believed that the situation was not much altered. — *Dawn* political correspondent

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.

Hopes buried amid massive oppression

AFGHANISTAN has often been called the graveyard of empires. The Afghan people have endured far more than most nations, having survived invasions, civil wars and decades of uncertainty. But behind the familiar tales of resistance lies something that is not talked about nearly as much; Afghanistan has also become a graveyard of hopes, prosperity and human rights.

The Afghan Taliban regularly celebrate their victories against world powers, presenting them as a proof of 'strength' and 'national pride', but their failure to build a functioning society negates their claims. Deep-rooted traditions, rigid attitudes and fear of change continue to slow down the country's social development.

Inside these limitations are rights and values that should never have been controversial in the first place: justice, equality, girls education, safety for minorities, protection for children, and the freedom to express art, music and literature. These are the things that help a society move forward, but they remain sidelined or dismissed as 'foreign' ideas.

The saddest part of Afghanistan's story, perhaps, is that every foreign withdrawal gave the country a new chance to rebuild itself, but almost every time, the moment slipped away. Women still face restrictions in their daily lives, girls lose access to classrooms, and minorities worry about their security. Artists, poets, and musicians find themselves silenced. A country that once produced some of the region's richest cultural expressions now struggles to keep them alive. On the other hand, Afghan Taliban export terrorism to Pakistan.

Afghanistan has no shortage of strength when it comes to resisting outsiders, but it hesitates when it comes to confronting its own internal problems. Pride becomes more important than progress. Weapons become symbols of authority, while welfare and wellbeing fall behind.

Afghanistan should not remain a place where dreams are buried deeper than fallen empires. A true empire is built where all communities cherish their dreams and live in peace enjoying collective freedom. Bravery is useless when every right is usurped and people have to live under constant threats.

If Afghanistan is to move forward, it must confront the restrictions it has imposed upon itself. Foreign powers may come and go, but hope should not. Real progress will only come when justice is accessible, when women have the same space in society as men, when children feel safe, when minorities are treated fairly, and when arts and science flourish together. The Afghan Taliban need to shun their regressive mentality and rigid customs.

Sadam Hussain Korai
Larkana

Shortage of graveyards

THIS is with reference to the report 'KMC plans five new graveyards as existing cemeteries run out of space' (Nov 30). The move was already overdue, and one hopes that the plan would be implemented soon. I understand that the practice of people buying land in advance for graves for themselves and family members has been abolished, which, of course, was the right thing to do in times of extreme scarcity of grave sites. However, now that new graveyards are being planned, advance booking should be restored on a limited scale in the four spacious graveyards that are being planned on the outskirts of the city.

As such, the advance sale of grave sites could be open not for families or tribes, but for specific persons who have already crossed the average life expectancy, which presently stands at 67.9 years, with eligibility increasing on the basis of every year past the average age.

The government could also determine what percentage of the total available land will be made available for advance booking.

Such a facility should be available only to the permanent residents of Pakistan for a specified number of years and on full payment in advance, which could reduce government financing requirements a bit.

S.R.H. Hashmi
Karachi

Naming projects

THE practice of naming underpasses, flyovers and other minor infrastructure after prime ministers, presidents or even leaders of friendly countries has become a common phenomenon.

The recent naming of an underpass in Islamabad after the Turkish president, rather than a more significant or symbolic tribute, can be seen as diminishing the stature and legacy of the leader. Such a modest gesture may fail to reflect the depth of respect and admiration deserved, reducing a figure of great influence and historical importance to a mere infrastructure label.

This trend often appears to serve more as a tool for political showmanship and score-settling rather than honouring genuine contributions. It can dilute the significance of such naming by choosing relatively low-value projects, and turning important public assets into symbols of political rivalry or fleeting popularity.

Limiting the naming rights to major, impactful projects, such as universities, airports or large cultural institutions, ensures that the honour is reserved for truly prominent and well-achieved personalities. These landmarks have lasting importance and visibility, making them more appropriate for commemorating individuals who have either sacrificed their lives, or have made significant contributions to society, nation-building or international relations.

This would encourage a more thoughtful and merit-based approach to recognising public figures with dignity and honour.

Restricting naming to major projects aligns better with the intent of honouring notable achievements with genuine legacies, and avoids the pitfalls of politicisation and superficial recognition.

Air Cdre (retd) M. Khalid Kamal
Islamabad

A commendable step

WE often discuss major national achievements in sports, diplomacy, defence and economics, and it is equally important to highlight a remarkable and highly commendable development in Pakistan. For the first time in the country's history, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony recently organised an international Quran recitation competition in Islamabad.

This prestigious global event not only showcased Pakistan's religious, cultural and spiritual identity, but also brought together representatives from over 40 countries from around the world. The participation of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states added further significance and honour to the competition. Hosting such an international event for the first time marks a major achievement for Pakistan, and reflects the ministry's dedicated efforts.

This initiative will enhance Pakistan's global image and strengthen the nation's spiritual bond with the larger Islamic world. In the past, Pakistan's talented students would travel abroad to represent the country in international Quran recitation competitions.

However, bringing this global competition to Pakistan is in itself a significant accomplishment, underlining Pakistan's growing role as a centre for international religious and spiritual events.

As we celebrate achievements in other national domains, we must wholeheartedly acknowledge and appreciate this initiative.

Hayan Ahmed Khan
Islamabad

Students and AI

THERE has been a growing concern about students using artificial intelligence (AI) tools, like ChatGPT, to complete their assignments. Some argue that it promotes laziness and dishonesty. Instead of blaming the students, we should ask why so many of them feel the need to rely on it in the first place. The truth is that many students are under enormous academic pressure.

They are often given workloads that exceed their capacity, with tight deadlines, vague instructions and limited support. Teachers are sometimes too rushed to explain the concepts properly, but they expect high-quality output from their students even after giving low-quality input. In this situation, it is not surprising that students turn to AI tools. They do so not to cheat, but to cope.

These tools can provide the help and clarity students do not always get in class. They offer explanations and examples, and help organise concepts for the students. Promoting responsible use of AI is important. Banning it or criticising the students will not solve the real issue.

If the education system wants students to depend less on AI, it must create an environment that supports genuine understanding, rather than just assigning more tasks and raising expectations.

The problem is not that Pakistani students continue to rely on AI; the problem is that they now feel they have no other choice.

Maham Saeed
Karachi

▶ **DRUGS IN CONCERTS:** Islamabad has witnessed a surge in music concerts and live events, drawing thousands of people. Many youngsters openly use drugs at these events, putting their health and safety at risk. Such a behaviour threatens their physical and mental wellbeing, and creates a negative example for other impressionable youth as well. If left unchecked, this could lead to addiction, accidents and long-term social problems. Authorities and event organisers should strengthen monitoring at concerts, educate the youth about the dangers of drug use, and ensure a safe and secure environment for one and all at such concerts. Parents and community leaders should also guide young people towards healthy recreational activities.
Muhammad Anfal
Islamabad

▶ **SANITATION WORKERS:** The tragic deaths of sanitation workers highlight a grave failure in protecting some of the country's most vulnerable citizens. Workers are routinely sent into sewers without proper safety equipment, exposing them to toxic gases and life-threatening conditions. Human rights reports and observations made by the Islamabad High Court have pointed to discrimination as a factor that perpetuates this dangerous and demeaning labour. Each year, around hundred workers lose their lives — not due to accidents, but as a result of systemic neglect and irresponsibility. Pakistan must ensure safe working conditions for all. To make this possible, urgent reforms are needed to uphold the dignity of these essential workers.
Shabaz Intezar
Turbat

▶ **NO FOOTPATHS:** Everywhere across the areas managed by the Capital Development Authority (CDA), there is encroachment on footpaths either by area residents or by some commercial establishment. A few examples can be seen on Nazimuddin Road in F-11/1. The absence of footpaths results in a number of accidents as people are forced to walk on the road most of the time. The matter needs immediate attention.
Mubashir
Islamabad

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
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